

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A process for cleaning tray columns which have been used for rectificatively treating liquids comprising (meth)acrylic acid ~~and/or~~ esters of (meth)acrylic acid or mixtures of (meth)acrylic acid and esters of (meth)acrylic acid thereof:
the process comprising

conveying a basic liquid downward through the tray column, and
passing a gas through the tray column in countercurrent to the basic liquid,
wherein during the cleaning, ~~the~~ a difference between ~~the~~ a pressure in the gas phase immediately below ~~the~~ a lowermost tray of the tray column and ~~the~~ a pressure in the gas phase immediately above ~~the~~ an uppermost tray of the tray column divided by the number of trays in the column is at least 0.5 mbar per tray.

Claim 2 (Currently Amended): ~~[[A]]~~ The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein, during the cleaning, the difference between the pressure in the gas phase immediately above the uppermost tray of the tray column and the pressure in the gas phase immediately below the lowermost tray of the tray column divided by the number of trays in the column is from 1 to 5 mbar per tray.

Claim 3 (Currently Amended): ~~[[A]]~~ The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein, during the cleaning, the difference between the pressure in the gas phase immediately above the uppermost tray of the tray column and the pressure in the gas phase immediately below the lowermost tray of the tray column divided by the number of trays in the column is from 2 to 4 mbar per tray.

Claim 4 (Currently Amended): [[A]] The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the basic liquid is an aqueous solution of sodium hydroxide.

Claim 5 (Currently Amended): [[A]] The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the gas passed through the tray column in countercurrent to the basic liquid is air.

Claim 6 (New): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein, during the cleaning, the difference between the pressure in the gas phase immediately above the uppermost tray of the tray column and the pressure in the gas phase immediately below the lowermost tray of the tray column divided by the number of trays in the column is from 0.5 to 5 mbar per tray.

Claim 7 (New): The process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the gas passed through the tray column in countercurrent to the basic liquid is selected from the group consisting of nitrogen, air, air diluted with nitrogen, steam and mixtures thereof.

Claim 8 (New): The process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the basic liquid is an aqueous solution of at least one selected from the group consisting of alkali metal hydroxide, alkaline earth metal hydroxide, NaOH, KOH and Ca(OH)₂.

Claim 9 (New): The process as claimed in Claim 7, wherein a substantially pH-neutral alkali metal salt, alkaline earth metal salt or a combination both is added to the basic aqueous solution.

Claim 10 (New): The process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the basic liquid is a basic polar organic solvent.

Claim 11 (New): The process as claimed in Claim 9, wherein the basic polar organic solvent is an amine, amide or a mixture of amine and amide.

Claim 12 (New): The process as claimed in Claim 7, wherein the basic aqueous solution is utilized from $>80^{\circ}\text{C}$ to about 115°C .

DISCUSSION OF THE AMENDMENTS

Claims 1-5 are currently amended.

Claims 6-12 are new.

New Claim 6 is supported by Claims 1 and 2.

New Claims 7-12 are supported on page 3, line 15 to page 4, line 17 of the specification.

Upon entry of the amendment Claims 1-12 will be active.

No new matter has been added by the amendments.